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Eagleburger (left) meeting with Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in Bonn

Winning Hearts and Minds

U.S. officials launch an offensive over El Salvador

The insurgency in El Salvador has been transformed into a textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers." With that stark assertion, the Reagan Administration last week launched a carefully orchestrated campaign to demonstrate that the Soviet Union, Cuba, Viet Nam and other Communist nations have been smuggling arms to the leftist guerrillas in El Salvador. The Administration's motive is to win support for increased U.S. military aid to that strife-torn nation, and the intensity of the effort is stunning.

A U.S. delegation headed by Lawrence Eagleburger, Reagan's choice as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, visited five European capitals with fresh evidence of Soviet-bloc mischief. Another team of U.S. envoys, headed by Lieut. General Vernon Walters, set out for Latin America. Secretary of State Alexander Haig headed for Capitol Hill to brief congressional leaders. The State Department provided embassies of friendly governments in Washington with a lengthy memorandum detailing its evidence. This week the Administration will cap its campaign with the release of a "white paper" summarizing its case that, as one State Department official put it, "El Salvador is an East-West conflict."

In what proved to be one of the most complex intelligence assessments conducted since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, officials at the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Intelligence Agency worked feverishly for more than two weeks assembling the evidence. Many of the details were provided by a clearly prejudiced party—the Salvadoran armed forces—and had to be double-checked. U.S. officials then had to tailor a presentation for foreign officials that would not compromise intelligence sources in Central America.

In the most dramatic briefings of the

week, Eagleburger offered his European listeners a chronological summary of Soviet-bloc efforts to arm the rebels. He described how, over the past two months, Soviet-built transport planes have been flying from Cuba to Managua, Nicaragua, and unloading a variety of American- and European-made arms, which are eventually smuggled into El Salvador. He backed up his assertions with a slide show that included blowups of documents allegedly written by a Communist guerrilla leader and detailing commitments made by Viet Nam, Ethiopia, the Soviet Union and East European nations to provide military hardware. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence was a series of photographs of a tractor-trailer said to have been captured in Honduras. Underneath the trailer's false bottom was a cache of about 150 M-16 assault rifles. Serial numbers on U.S. weapons recovered from the guerrillas have been traced to the arsenal left behind by U.S. forces in Viet Nam.

West European officials were somewhat surprised that, as one top British diplomat put it, "the first business of the U.S. with its European allies should turn out to be El Salvador." Yet they seemed uniformly impressed by the evidence and grateful to the Reagan Administration for consulting with them. "We are now inclined to believe that arms of a certain precise origin are being used with the aim of destabilizing El Salvador," admitted a French official last week.

Bonn, Paris and London all expressed concern, however, about just how far the U.S. should go in supporting the military-civilian junta now ruling El Salvador. West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt is in an especially uncomfortable position, since leftists in Schmidt's own Social Democratic Party support the Salvadoran government. In a meeting with U.S. officials in Bonn, Schmidt made it clear that they would like to see the U.S. strive for a negotiated set-

tlement between the warring factions in El Salvador rather than risk escalating the conflict by supplying more arms. Officials in Bonn and Paris also asked the U.S. to urge the Salvadoran government to demonstrate greater respect for human rights—an indication that the Reagan Administration's reluctance to press friendly regimes on their human rights records may not be shared by some allies.

On his mission to Latin America, Walters, formally deputy chief of the CIA, visited Mexico and Venezuela, and this week he plans to stop in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Though Walters conferred with Mexican President José López Portillo, neither country would confirm the meeting publicly; Mexico sympathizes with the Salvadoran guerrillas, and Walters' visit could be an embarrassment.

Congressional leaders responded favorably to the briefings. Senator Charles Percy, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, vowed that "this nation will do whatever is necessary to prevent a Communist takeover in El Salvador." He added: "We are prepared to draw the line here, here and now." Nevertheless, Percy warned Haig that the U.S. must also insist that the junta step up its search for the murderers of three American nuns and a lay religious worker killed in El Salvador last December.

Indeed, there was growing concern, in Congress and in Europe, that the Administration is turning a blind eye to the Salvadoran junta's faults and is prepared to offer military assistance without qualification. To quell such fears, the State Department issued a statement last week emphasizing its support of "basic economic and political reforms, including elections in 1982-83," in El Salvador.

Meanwhile, TIME has learned that Washington is debating whether to send Army mobile training teams to El Salvador. The teams, composed of half a dozen soldiers, are typically sent to foreign countries to instruct infantry units in such subjects as weaponry and reconnaissance tactics. Team members are not combat advisers, and congressional approval is not required to send them to El Salvador. Nevertheless, the proposal is generating controversy in both Washington and San Salvador. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger told the State Department last week that he could not go along with the plan. Salvadoran government officials fear that if they accept the teams they will be admitting they need outside help to defeat the guerrillas. Still, leftist guerrillas are beginning to skirmish again with Salvadoran soldiers, scarcely a month after the defeat of the insurgents' self-proclaimed "final offensive." Authorities in San Salvador are predicting a long struggle—and it is one in which U.S. soldiers could possibly find themselves under

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